

## Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, December 3, 1889, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. Oregon, December 3rd, 1889. My dear Alec:

We have been travelling all day through a sandy desert in which only the earth colored sage-brushes flourish. At first great grey plains covered with sage-brushes stretched way back to the distance where snow-topped mountains fenced them in. Gradually as we journeyed on the plains grew less level, though not less grey and desolate looking, a few red cattle grazing in herds long distances apart, furnishing the only bits of color. Low rounded hills approached or receded from our track, signs of water altogether wanting at first grew more numerous, although the country is so dry that railway cuttings are so narrow that in ordinary climates the sand of which they are formed would at every freshet slip down and cover the track. By and by like a green ribbon appeared the Snake River and for hours we have been following its winding's in and out among mountains that constantly approach ever nearer and increase in height though still looking like gigantic anthills a resemblance carried out more closely in some, where not even the ubiquitous Sage-brush finds nourishment on their steep and sandy sides. We have crossed the green Snake river which at the last hurried its current a little as it disported with us the way through a narrow twisted defile which had a rugged bare beauty of its own to which a tall, finely-shaped snow mountain lent grandeur, and are now rapidly passing through a narrow valley which in comparison with the country through which we have travelled all day yesterday and today seems fertile. A few puny red brushes that look like diminutive willow trees, and now, Oh wondrous sight, a few bare trees over six feet high dispute the wild ground with the sage brushes. They are the first trees we have seen since leaving the half dozen melancholy, wind-swept pines on the Rockies Papa insisted on photographing as indisputable witness of their existence. But even as I write the character of the land

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which so long has been unvarying in it's monotony is constantly changing. This narrow little valley scarce a hundred yards from mountain to mountain watered by a muddy little stream seems rich. We have just passed a plantation of apple trees, and the rail fence, that first sign of ownership, has reappeared. The tiny board houses are all new, the boards still fresh and yellow not turned to the eternal grey of further back and a little while ago we passed our first white covered emigrant wagon on the march. We had seen them before standing in the little enclosure of some new home either resting at the end of it's journey or until it's owners move on again in the spring. Again the scene has changed, The rail fence still follows us and here is a homestead with a big stack of yellow grain but all around is sand and sage. Now the anthills have fallen back, the valley widened out into a pretty level plain generally a desert of sand and sage, but along the muddy life-giving stream are strips of rich cultivated land. It is strange on my right the desert on my left the oasis of stream and cultivated land and homesteads more numerous than since days, nestling at the foot of blue snow-covered mountains.

I wonder will you take the trouble to read all this trash. I wonder do you ever think of me in the midst of that work of yours of which I am so proud and yet so jealous, for I know it has stolen from me part of my husband's heart, for where his thoughts and interests lie there too must his heart be. I live in hope that you will not quite 3 forget me, and that we may pass many another summer like the last when we had thoughts and interests in common. You don't know how I enjoyed having you again and not to feel as I have done so many a long year, that as Grace said, "all I said to you went in one ear and out the other".

Did you read the letter I wrote to Mr. McCurdy was it yesterday or the day before, I lose count, each day of steaming on and on is so like the other. I particularly wanted to know what you thought of giving a Christmas Dinner to McInnis and his family, Johnny, Mr. and Mrs Martin and the two or three other men who form your regular staff. I thought it would have a good effect on making them feel practically that you had not forgotten Beinn Bhreagh and were watching to see the work done as well as keeping up your interests in the men themselves. I hope you will sanction the repairs of 17th. St. I think

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them necessary. A lady should not be ashamed to show anyone over her house back as well as front at any time, and I could not have done that last year. Tell Charles he is such a good servant that I want him to be a better one. His table looks very nicely always, not so his pantry or shelves.

I hope you keep your promise of walking every day; I sadly fear that Duke may be a temptation. Oh, I want the new horse, Frank I think his name to be, traded for another more stylish one. I think grey would be very pretty with the other brown one.

Here is a tree not a willow or an apple but a real tree and apparently a wild one too, another and another, I think they are pines-Papa says we are in Oregon now, it is not cold, about the usual temperature of Washington at this season. The pines are more numerous though stunted. We have just made a great trip going around a mile and come within a few 4 hundred feet of where we were before but a good deal higher. We are in a perfect jumble of hills shut in by steep snow mountains going higher nothing but sand, sand, sage-brushes scarce, sudden turn and cultivated fields and apple tree plantations and houses, gone again, back again though now on the level of the first snow and even the faithful rail fence, Cattle abound and board homesteads with their stacks of yellow grain. I don't think we have seen so many homesteads since leaving the Shenandoah or was it the Susquehanna Here are tall cotton-wood trees. We go ever higher; the first snow is below us, the sand is redder, in the plowed fields it is rich black. These are the Blue Mountains of Oregon. They are pretty steep now — the valley below cannot be more than fifty feet wide; it has cotton-wood trees and red cattle. Where we are reign the sage and an occasional scrubby pine and the rail fence. We are going downhill now and the sun has come out.

Goodbye, tell me if I bore you. Much love my dear to you and my babies and Mamma. I hope you show her what a dear little boy you can be when you want to. How is your Mother, give her and your father my love.

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Yours ever, Mabel.